

Kennecott-Bonanza Ridge

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior



Access: Trailhead north of Kennecott Mill Town

Distance: Approximately 28 miles round trip (loop).

Time: 7-8 days

Maps: USGS Maps-McCarthy (B-6), (B-5), (C-6), (C-5) 1:63,360; McCarthy 1:250,000

Difficulty: Strenuous with moderate route finding



View of the Stairway Icefall

Route:

From the Kennecott Visitor Center, walk through the Kennecott Mill Town north towards the Root Glacier. About a half mile beyond the visitor center, the road will split. Take the left hand trail. The trail will soon cross over Bonanza Creek and then wind its way through the lateral moraines of the Kennicott and Root Glaciers. After about a mile the trail curves sharply to the right and uphill, follow the trail to cross Jumbo Creek on the footbridge. After



approximately another 1/4 mile, the trail reaches the Root Glacier access trail, continue **past** the access trail. (Primitive campsites, along with an outhouse and food lockers, are available in this area.)

In another 1/4 mile the trail will cross the dry outwash plain of Amazon Creek. Depending on recent rainfall or spring melt, Amazon Creek may be flowing above ground. The trail continues in and out of brush and along the top of the moraine for another 2 miles. Towards the end of the trail, the Erie Mine Bunkhouse building will be visible ahead and high above on the hillside to the right of the trail. The safest routes down the lateral moraine will be in this zone, well before the cables to the Erie Mine Tram Line. (The bunkhouse is not visible from the tram cables) Not far past the tram, the trail is cut off by a very steep rock cliff. It is very difficult and dangerous to try and climb down here to the glacier in order to continue hiking. If you reach the Erie Mine Tram Cables, it is best to back track a 1/2 mile or more and find a safer route down the steep walls.

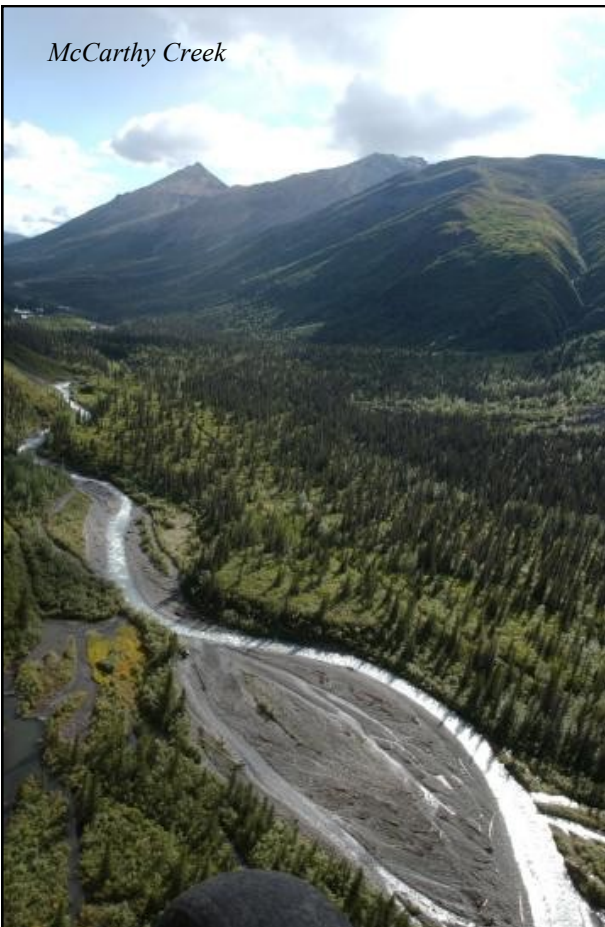
Once down along the glacier, below the steep ridge, follow the trough that has been formed between the glacier ice and the lateral moraine. It is rocky and uncomfortable hiking. Eventually the trough will open up onto the ice of Root Glacier. The ice is relatively flat and “dry” since the winter snow melts off by the end of May and crevasses are exposed. It is possible to hike without crampons in warm and sunny weather in boots with good traction. However, in cloudy or cold weather, the glacier becomes hard and very slippery making crampons essential.

The glacier has dammed a lake to your right. You will want to hike around this lake on the ice several hundred yards to the left of the lake (it generally drains by mid-June and has numerous large icebergs beached in the basin).

While crossing the glacier, head towards the “Knoll” on the east side of the glacier. Use this as a landmark for crossing the glacier. Route find through the rock covered portion of the glacier to reach the lateral moraine a couple of hundred yards to the right of the waterfall. Climb up the hillside in the meadow to the right of the waterfall, the final destination being the creek above the waterfall.

From the top of the waterfall, hike up the stream watching for the trail on the left hand side of the water. The trail leads to an area suitable for camping on top of the "knob" or "knoll" (elevation 3800'). This is a beautiful spot which offers one of the best views of the Stairway Icefall. From here you are going to cross Bonanza Ridge and drop down into the McCarthy Creek drainage to the east. From the knob you can look along the ridge and see the lower pass that you will be hiking through, a 5400' pass between P5905' and P6506'.

From the knob, hike down to the north, winding your way down through the low brush to reach the top of the moraine. Follow the top of the moraine to reach the foot of the hillside leading to the pass. Hike up the grassy hillside, and then rock scree to the low pass. A campsite can be made in the loose shale in the pass. The pass offers views to the west across the Donoho Peak ridge towards Mt. Blackburn, and to the east of the peaks above McCarthy Creek and the glaciers flowing off the flanks of Regal Mountain. You will be hiking down the stream drainage that drops off the east side of the ridge into the McCarthy Creek Valley .



McCarthy Creek

Potential Hazards:

- Travel with caution near and around glacial melt pools and river potholes. The fine glacier silt may look dry but it can be very slippery. The melt pools are also extremely cold.
- Check the water level and passability of McCarthy Creek with local residents or at the Kennecott Visitor Center before beginning your hike. The water level may be too high to cross and you may need to change your route accordingly. Care should always be taken with creek crossings.

Hike down the hillside to reach the valley floor below. The trail along McCarthy Creek cuts back and forth across the stream several times as it goes down the valley. The trail may be hard to follow as it is not maintained. You may want to follow the easiest path down the stream to avoid the brush.

About 5 miles down the valley is a private airstrip on the East side of the river with a small portion of the property reaching to the West side of the river. The Motherlode Mine tram station (private property) is about one mile down river on the East side. Please do not trespass. This property is marked on the in the detail section of the Trails Illustrated Map. The trail below the tram station crosses McCarthy Creek several times and follows the historic route. Additionally, recent activity by some local residents makes the route from here to McCarthy appear more as a road than a trail. It should be straightforward to follow below the private home site, but with numerous stream crossings. When you reach the town of McCarthy, residents have put up a bridge across McCarthy Creek which makes it easy for hikers to get back across the creek.